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Interview with Florence VanLaeys

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Fort Hays State University

Florence Van Laeys

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CHAPTER II
ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

MIKE: This is Mike Stegman on June 23, 1987. My oral history interview of a one-room schoolhouse teacher in Kansas is with Florence Van Laeys. This interview is taking place at her home. Today we are going back in time to the 1930's when you began your teaching career as a one-room schoolhouse teacher in Wallace County, Kansas. What formal education did you have?

FLORENCE: I went to high school. When I graduated from high school, I studied that summer, and then took the teachers' examination for a second grade certificate. I received my second grade certificate. You could teach two years on a second grade certificate. In that two-year's time you had to get a first grade certificate. To get the second grade certificate, you had to take an examination over fifteen subjects. You had no one to help you on studying or anything. Generally, you went to the superintendent and got old tests that had been used through the years and looked up the answers, studied those questions, and hoped that they asked something about the same when you took the

examination. In two years you were to get the first grade certificate and add English, history, and algebra. You had to have a ninety average to get your first grade certificate. I did that first summer. The tests were taken the last of June. When I got through high school, they were having an institute at Norton, Kansas. Since we had moved out here from Norton, and I had friends down there, I went there to the two-week institute then came back to Sharon Springs and took the examinations. The next two summers I went to institute at Hays. These were month institutes. We had the superintendent from Ellis County, Mr. Christensen. You took anything on which you had a grade below ninety and thought you needed help on, and you could work on your English, history, and algebra. He taught English history. He had a speech defect. Learning all the queens and kings and rulers of England in a month's time was something, but I was able to get my first grade certificate. Later they let you change that certificate for a state certificate. Then you had to take six hours of college to renew your state certificate. I started with correspondence work, but with two little kids and living on a farm, I decided it wasn't worthwhile, so I never kept up my state certificate.

MIKE: Was this a college certificate?

FLORENCE: This was just a state certificate that they used to replace the first and second grade certificates.

MIKE: What was the usual age a child began school?

FLORENCE: The usual age should have been five years, but I had one girl that they needed a baby-sitter for, so I had her part of the time at four. I had them all the way to seventeen years old. I had students almost as old as I was.

MIKE: Did many children move in and out of school during the year?

FLORENCE: Yes, they did. I had one school that at one time--this was a one-room school--had twenty-four students because people would move in with their parents for a while or with families, and then they would move out.

MIKE: What was the greatest distance traveled by any student, and how did they get there?

FLORENCE: The first year I taught I had one little boy, a five year old, who rode a shetland pony two and a half miles to school. He was a tiny little boy whom I would

have to go out and meet, help him get off his pony, tie his pony up, and when he got ready to leave, I would go and put him back on his pony and start him home. A lot of the children walked. They would walk all the way from half of a mile to two and a half miles. There was one year that I taught in a school--it was my fourth year of teaching and I was married then--that had consolidated two districts. We lived in the schoolhouse in a district where they weren't having school. We were to use our car to transport the children to school. Each year the teacher that had been there would sell the benches to the new teacher. They would take the back seat out of the car, put the benches in, and that was the way you took the children to school. Some of those went about five miles.

MIKE: What grade levels did you teach?

FLORENCE: Everything from first grade through eighth grade. The year I had the twenty-four students I taught all grades.

MIKE: What type of occupations did the students take up when they were done?

FLORENCE: I have students who have gone to school who are nurses, students who work in the secret service department of the government, one who was a doctor, a number of them who are school principals and school teachers. A lot of these students over the years have come back to see me whenever they get a chance. I have one--who just last year--who I had as a student in 1930 who called and told me he had just got his GED, and he was so happy. He wanted me to know.

MIKE: That's good. Did the students from your schools come from a particular cultural or heritage background?

FLORENCE: Most of the students were just farm children. I had one little boy who came to me in midterm of the first year I taught. He was in the fourth grade. He was from Corsica. He and his father could speak English, but the mother and the brother couldn't. The little brother came to school to visit, and he could not speak English.

MIKE: How long did most of these students stay in school? How many years?

FLORENCE: They would go the full eight grades.

MIKE: How many years were they required to go?

FLORENCE: They had to go either until they were sixteen or graduated from the eighth grade.

MIKE: What was the dress and overall appearance of the students?

FLORENCE: They wore overalls, bib overalls, and heavy shoes. Sometimes the girls wore bib overalls and shirts, also. The first year I taught I had all boys in school. I never learned to play marbles because I had just one sister and no boys in the family, but I did learn to play marbles that year. The boys would get to play marbles for keep so I started playing for keeps with them. When I got their marbles, they couldn't play marbles any longer. They also played a lot of baseball. They made up their own rules so we had a lot of different rules. There was never any equipment at a school. I would have a program and a box supper. We would use the proceeds of that to get us some balls and bats and always some books because they had very limited libraries.

MIKE: What was the cost of education to the student and his family?

FLORENCE: There was no cost. They were tax supported. My first year was in 1930. Everything was getting pretty tight. They couldn't give you a pay check. They gave you a warrant signed by the school board. If you were lucky enough to get somebody to cash your warrant, you had some money. Otherwise you waited until they got some money in from taxes before you could get paid.

MIKE: Describe a typical day before and after school.

FLORENCE: Before school. School took up at nine o'clock in the morning, and you let out at four o'clock in the afternoon except in winter. If you wanted to have a half hour noon, you could get out at three thirty. Of course, you were your own janitor. I would always get to school in the winter when it was cold, at least an hour before the students would get there, to have the fire going. Most of the time you didn't have enough coal to bank the fire so you had to build the fire every morning and warm up the building. You would pump the water and get your water in for the day in a water cooler. You would get your coal and fuel carried in. I would either clean my schoolhouse at night before I left or do it in the morning before the students got there.

They would start to get to school anywhere from eight-thirty to nine o'clock. We rang the bell, and the students would all come in and get their seats. Then we would begin what we called our opening exercises. We would have the flag salute. I never could carry a tune so we very seldom sang, but I would read a book. They loved to be read to. Horse stories were their favorites. Generally you'd read to them five minutes in the morning and five minutes at noon until they settled down. If we were in a very interesting spot in the book, we would read ten minutes instead of five. We had fifteen minute recesses. At ten-thirty we had a recess and at two-thirty we had a fifteen minute recess. I never sent children on the playground alone. I was always out there.

MIKE: How are teaching ways or habits different now then they were back then?

FLORENCE: Today a teacher doesn't have much work. They have things pretty well planned for them. We had our own plans to make for everything. Our superintendent visited us once a year. We never knew when the superintendent was coming. You made your lesson plans, and you tried to follow those lesson plans unless maybe

you just had one student in a grade. What if he missed school that day? Then your lesson plans were kind of put back because you had to put them in order again. Our class periods varied. The first graders. I always tried to have them read at least twice a day and tried to help them with their spelling and arithmetic--they call it math now, it was arithmetic then--twice a day. I always graded my own papers. I never believed in having students grade papers for me.

MIKE: How were teachers expected to conduct themselves in the community?

FLORENCE: They were pretty strict. We had literaries in the community. Some of the school did not hire married teachers. They did not hire pregnant teachers. They did not teach school if they were pregnant.

MIKE: Were you in charge of any extracurricular activities outside of your schoolhouse?

FLORENCE: No, we didn't have to.

MIKE: Was there any problem with teacher turnover? Was it hard to find teachers?

FLORENCE: No, there were lots of teachers. Lots of teachers had trouble finding schools. They didn't have enough schools for the teachers. I never had any trouble in getting a school. In fact, one year I had two contracts and couldn't decide which one to accept.

MIKE: So once they came there, they usually stayed?

FLORENCE: You could stay. Yes.

MIKE: Was there any type of principal for your school?

FLORENCE: No.

MIKE: Just a superintendent?

FLORENCE: Just the county superintendent whom you had to send your reports in to.

MIKE: Was there an evaluation system for the teachers?

FLORENCE: No.

MIKE: How were the discipline problems with the children handled?

FLORENCE: You handled your own problems. I never had any trouble with students. I always tried to be their friend. I can't say that I ever had any trouble with any of them.

MIKE: So the parents weren't involved in any of the discipline process?

FLORENCE: Oh, yes, the first year I taught I got a note from one mother practically every morning for several weeks. I finally got tired of it and asked her who was teaching this school. Was it her or me? From then on I had no trouble with her. She had been a former teacher.

MIKE: Where did you live while you taught?

FLORENCE: The first two years I taught I was at home, and I drove to the school. The next year I rented a room in a home with a family of Mennonites. The mother couldn't speak English. The walls were thin. They were a large family. All I heard was German while I was there. They had a family, three grown boys and a grown daughter. They were in my room more than they were in their house, I think. So I had lots of company.

MIKE: These were some of your students?

FLORENCE: No, they weren't students. They were out of school. They had graduated from the eighth grade. Then, as I said, after I was married, we lived in the schoolhouse that year. One year I lived in Sharon Springs and had a school eighteen miles south of Sharon Springs. I took one teacher about five miles out to her school, another one about ten miles to her school, and then I would go on to my school.

MIKE: You had a car then?

FLORENCE: Yes, then the last year I taught, I taught the home school, and I walked to school. A couple of years I walked. It was two to two and a half miles, and I liked to walk so I walked to school.

MIKE: What type of subjects were studied?

FLORENCE: We had about the same as they do now. Our main thing was arithmetic. We taught the combinations of addition, subtraction, division, and multiplication at sight. They did not have to count on their fingers then like I see kids doing now days. We had writing. We expected them to write so you could read it. We had reading. We had histories, government, Kansas history, and social studies. At first--the first three years I

taught--they hadn't put social studies in yet. We had nothing to teach social studies with. We had to make up our own program the first year they came out. The way I made mine was mostly with questions, and I would make copies. We didn't have any way to make copies. I typed mine up and made my own copies. They would be questions for the student to look up the answers and write them out. Spelling was a very important subject, and they had a lesson every day.

MIKE: Did all of the classes, the first graders up to the eight graders, have the same classes in a particular order?

FLORENCE: No, it was hard to plan your program because some students and some classes required more time. You would sometimes have a five minute class period. If you had one student in that class, five minutes of personal attention to that child would be alright, but if you had a class like I have had of six or seven in a reading class, five minutes was not enough. You wanted every student to read some so you had to adjust that program for those students to be able to have that period, and I did give lots of tests. I think that was the main thing

my students always complained about. Do we have a test today?

MIKE: Did the first graders have spelling the same time as the eighth graders? Did all eight grades have the same subjects?

FLORENCE: No, part of the time I would have them write their spelling words, part of the time I would let them spell them orally. Most of the children today don't know what a recitation bench is. When it was time for that class, they came forward and sat on the recitation bench so they were up there right in front of you to pay attention to what you were doing. They didn't sit back in seats. Most of the seats were also double seats that had two students sitting together. The punishment lots of times would be for boys and girls to sit together. Back then they didn't like to sit together. You could punish them by setting a boy and a girl together. Then next time you spoke to them, they obeyed. But on the classes, your periods. You would try and follow the reading classes maybe. But these first grades were always listening to what was going on in the other classes. At the end of the day they could tell you what that eighth grader had had in the reading class or maybe

in the geography or history classes. That's where I think one student was learning from another student. Today they are in separate classrooms, and they are not learning from the older students.

MIKE: That is pretty interesting. I never thought of it that way. What was the length of the school day and school year?

FLORENCE: The school day, as I said, was from nine until four, and then they were eight month terms. The first Monday in September was when you started the school. Snow days. They didn't know there were snow days. If you couldn't get to school, then the students couldn't get there. But very seldom was a day missed unless there was a blizzard. I did have one time--that was the first year I taught--of the March blizzard which lots of people remember. I think it started the 29th day of March. It started out beautiful that morning, and then it turned to big flakes of snow. I was at school, and it started getting cold. I already had a number of the students at school. We started carrying in buckets of coal. We did have a little ante room on the schoolhouse that year, and we just kept carrying coal in until we had the whole corner full. Of course, we had

out-of-doors toilets so there had to be something. Remember, I had all boys. There were no buckets or anything for them so we used the coal bucket out in the hall for their pot. We did have a well so we got the bucket full of water. The little boy that rode the horse hadn't got to school that day. He didn't come so we didn't have to worry about the horse. That blizzard kept getting worse. Mike hasn't asked me yet about the lunches, but they were carried in gallon syrup cans. I didn't take a whole lot of lunch, generally. But I didn't eat my lunch that day. I thought they might need it before the day was over, which they did, as we didn't get away from the school until the next day in late afternoon. The snow was blowing in the schoolhouse. We put the desks around the stove, and the little ones slept on the benches covered up with our coats that night, and the older boys stayed awake with me to keep the fire going. We told lots of stories that night.

MIKE: Was there a particular date that school had to start and a particular date it had to end?

FLORENCE: No, you just started the first Monday in September.

MIKE: Did this time frame ever change while you were still teaching?

FLORENCE: No.

MIKE: What teaching methods were used?

FLORENCE: There wasn't such a thing as a video then but we had a black board. We had plenty of chalk and erasers. The arithmetic. They would go to the blackboard, and they'd work their problems on the blackboard for you. We had our spelling and our reading. The reading was oral reading, but on our classics they would read the stories, and then you would ask them questions. They were comprehensive to see whether they were remembering what they were reading. The history was the same. They had a writing book, but I also graded their writing on test papers because they will take time to do a nice paper in writing. If they don't do a good paper on a test that you can read, then the writing in the writing book didn't mean anything.

MIKE: Were there any teaching aids that came along during your career that made it simpler to teach?

FLORENCE: No, not really. Those districts then didn't have enough money to buy teaching help. I would even

subscribe for my own magazines. We did have some teaching magazines that had help. I would buy books, some art books and things like that because you didn't teach art or any of that. We would take on Friday--if they had their work done all week--we would take the last period after recess, and we would have art, or we would have ciphering matches, spelling matches, geography matches, woodworking, something that they were interested in that they would work for all week so they would get that last period on Friday off.

MIKE: Did you use any type of competency test to promote them to another grade?

FLORENCE: No, you went on the year's work and the year's grade. You had an attendance record and a grade record that you kept. You kept your grades in that for every day's work. Our report cards then were put out at the end of every month. You averaged up those grades. That's how you determined whether they were passing to another grade or not.

MIKE: Did you have any type of school library?

FLORENCE: There was very little library. We might have had a few books and a dictionary and a few maps.

MIKE: What type of textbook materials did you have?

FLORENCE: The books were the state approved books that were used. Each student had to furnish his own book. They bought their books, and if they were careful with their books their parents could sell them to another family, or they could hand them down to other children.

MIKE: Did you furnish these books for them to buy or did they have to go downtown to buy them?

FLORENCE: They had to go to the store and buy their books. Generally the drug stores handled the books.

MIKE: What was the atmosphere of the educational program?

FLORENCE: I think that their educational system then probably was just as good as what it is today. It was on a different scale. You were teaching that child because you wanted him to get all the education he could because so many didn't even go on to high school. You tried to teach them not only sportsmanship out on the school yard, but you tried to teach them to make the most and to prepare themselves for something. Later, after the first couple of years more of the students

were going on to high school. I have had a lot of students who really did great.

MIKE: What were some rules of the school that may be different from today? Attendance policies. If I don't want to come to school today, am I going to be in trouble tomorrow?

FLORENCE: Parents just expected that child to go to school, and they sent them to school. Of course, they had no other distraction. In the winter time there was no radio, there was no nothing at home. At school they got out with other students. They could play. They could have a good time, and they wanted to go to school. That was their only outlet, to get with somebody, lots of times.

MIKE: Did you have any special observances at your school, Christmas programs, spelling bees, music contests, or anything along those lines?

FLORENCE: Our main thing was that we always had a Christmas program. We always had a program and a box supper. We had recitations and songs and dialogue. The year I had all boys I had a little trouble. It is hard to get plays with all boys. I had two boys who

willingly dressed up as girls and took girls' parts. We always had a box supper, and we always would have our Christmas program. I think probably there was no such thing as going to another school then to have competition with any other school.

MIKE: Did you have any type of graduation exercise?

FLORENCE: They had to come to Sharon Springs to take their tests for eighth grade graduation, and then they had to come to Sharon Springs for their graduation exercises. That's why some children--they tell me--wouldn't get to come because it was too far to Sharon Springs to take their examinations, and, well, they had finished eighth grade. It was just as good as graduation they would think.

MIKE: How far was it into Sharon Springs?

FLORENCE: From the one school up there it was about 35 to 36 miles for some to Sharon Springs. Some vehicles weren't all that good then, and some of them would probably have to drive team and wagon.

MIKE: When was the schoolhouse built?

FLORENCE: I don't know when the schoolhouse was built. There was one school district there that had two schoolhouses in the district. There was a very small schoolhouse, and then there was a larger schoolhouse about three miles from the small one. Wherever the most children were, that's where they would have school, or the ones that were the most persuasive in the district would have school where theirs could go to the closer school. I taught in the small schoolhouse which was a very small schoolhouse. In fact, it was so small it had two windows on each side. That can tell you what the size of it would have been. The one schoolhouse that is still standing is an old cement block schoolhouse. Nobody could move it so it's still there. I think there is just that building and one other one north of Wallace that is still standing of the country schools in Wallace County. Some of them have been moved. One of them burnt down, and farmers have bought them. When they would get to where there were no children in the district anymore, they would abandon it and sell their equipment to another district or anyone who wanted to get it.

MIKE: The farmers then in a particular area built the school. How did they choose where to put these schools?

FLORENCE: I can't answer that, Mike. I don't know why they were built in those certain locations, but the districts were what built the schools, and they had those districts far enough apart because of the two schools there. I know there must have been a distance of about ten miles between those schools. I think probably in the early days when they started building those schools they built them according to the population in the district. As I say, that one was of cement blocks which has lasted through the years, but I don't know the dates those were built.

MIKE: Were most of them built with something other than cement blocks?

FLORENCE: They were just frame buildings. The one where I told you, the little school and the other one and then the larger schoolhouse were sold and then years later, probably in the 40's they sold that little one, the little four window one, and built a large school there with a basement. When all the children out there grew up, there was no use for it, and the district was

consolidated with Sharon Springs. That's what happened with all those schools. They consolidated with other schools. We consolidated with Kanorado. They were consolidated with Sharon Springs. They were consolidated into Weskan and into Wallace.

MIKE: Some of the students went different directions?

FLORENCE: Yes, those from a district would go one place generally. That is what finally caused all the old rural schools to be closed.

MIKE: Were these schools public schools?

FLORENCE: Yes.

MIKE: Anybody could attend?

FLORENCE: Yes.

MIKE: What type of heating, lighting, and toilets were available?

FLORENCE: Out-of-door toilets and heating was with an old round coal stove. No lighting whatsoever. In the dust bowl days there were times when we had to not have school the rest of the day. I would tell them stories

from books to keep them quiet. The dust. It would be so dark in the schoolhouse they couldn't see to study. At the one school we had a field on four sides of it. We got the dust no matter what way the wind was from. You just couldn't see. Then you went to school the next day a little early to get the dust out so the kids could even sit down and be at their desks. The dust would be in the schoolhouse so bad. The water. Sometimes there was not a well at school. Then you carried the water. The teacher would bring the water in cream cans or something and put it in the cooler when you got there. Each child had a cup. The cup hung on a nail by the cooler. They had a name over their nail so they knew their cup. That's not saying that everybody drank out of his own cup, but that was the general idea for them to do that. Their lunch was packed, as I say, in a gallon syrup bucket. You didn't even have a cabinet to put it in. They were set back in a corner, but each child had his name on his bucket or knew his bucket. So they knew what they were getting when they got their dinner.

MIKE: Did your school or schools--you taught in more than one of them--have names?

FLORENCE: Yes, they all had names. Every district had a number and a name.

MIKE: Can you remember any of those names?

FLORENCE: Oh, yes, there was High Hope, Western Star, West Hope, Dunbar, Plain View. Those were ones that I taught in.

MIKE: What was the significance of the name?

FLORENCE: I don't know how the school was named originally.

MIKE: Can you describe the inside of the school building for me?

FLORENCE: Yes, very plain. They had windows on both sides and no blinds, just windows. If a child got too hot, he had to move. The same with the stove. Once in a while they had those warm warming stoves which were a little better. Generally they were what they call the old pot-belly coal stove. The child who sat next to it was too hot, and the one back away from it was too cold. I always tried to get my desk clear back so that I would know how the heat was in back for the coldest child to know whether he needed to be moved up or not. The walls

were painted, generally. Most districts would go in before school started, and the school board would either hire someone to go in and clean the schoolhouse up and paint it and cut the weeds in the school yard. Once in a while they got a load of coal in the coal house and some kindling. I did teach in one place where they couldn't afford coal for me to bank the stove at night. They didn't even have kindling. I would have to go and gather my kindling up of a morning or take it with me so I could get my fire started. You may wonder why you needed kindling. Coal will not start without some kindling to start it.

MIKE: Were you in charge of keeping the building in shape during the school year?

FLORENCE: No, just keeping it clean. The school board was supposed to. If there was a window broken, which ever so often there was where you played baseball. Also, one of their games was annle over over the schoolhouse with a ball. Once in a while they didn't get the ball over, and it'd break a window. The school board would have to see that those were fixed.

MIKE: Can you tell me any special events that happened at the school?

FLORENCE: Well, I think probably the most traumatic one was when I had the children there during the blizzard trying to keep them entertained so that they wouldn't get scared and worried. As far as any casualties on the school ground, we never had any. I think probably I wound up in the worst shape because we were playing soccer with a tin can. One of the boys who wore a size twelve shoe missed the can and kicked me in the shin. I think probably that was about the worst injury we had.

MIKE: Were there any physical changes that occurred to the schoolhouse itself during the time you were there?

FLORENCE: No, there weren't. From the time I taught in one one year until I went back and taught in that same district several years later, they did add on a little entrance way and had a place out there where they could hang their coats and set their lunch pails. We could put what few balls and bats and things we had in there.

MIKE: What were some of the physical problems of the building, besides not having any water and lights?

FLORENCE: Cold, they were cold. They had high ceilings, like all buildings had then. An old coal stove was hard to heat them. Some of the floors were slivered. Most

of the districts furnished sweeping compound. It was a red oiled sawdust that you could sprinkle on the floor. They never painted the floor. You sprinkled it before you got started to sweep. That would leave an oil spot, but it would keep the dust down while you were sweeping.

MIKE: What type of floors were these?

FLORENCE: Just old slivered wood floors mostly that the kids had tracked on for years and years.

MIKE: You said that a couple of the schoolhouses are still standing. What happened to all the equipment and supplies after the schools closed?

FLORENCE: They would sometimes transfer them to other schools. When the school out there was consolidated with Kanorado, Kanorado took what books and desks and those things that they could use. Lots of people would go in and buy the stuff. My father bought me the bell and the dictionary of the first school I taught in when it sold out. Then that stuff would be left there because in the one schoolhouse up there, and probably there were others, we had Sunday school for years after they didn't have school. The piano and the desk seats and all of that were left there to use for Sunday

school. Then eventually people have stolen the stuff. They stole the stove and the teacher's chair. The old piano is still in the one up there, but the mice have lived in it for years. Most of them would have a sale. They would sell the building and the equipment in it unless they were consolidating with another school. Then it was taken to the other school.

MIKE: What were the boundaries of the school's jurisdiction?

FLORENCE: It varied. I don't think there were any set boundaries, that is, any certain number of acres. They would tell you the children from this farm would be going to this school while maybe a farm a mile away they would be going to another school. They evidently had their boundaries set, but the teacher wasn't aware of where that boundary was. When the student came to school, you accepted that student.

MIKE: How was it decided who went where?

FLORENCE: It was according to the district you were in. They would say you're in, like you're in district 16. It seemed as though when the people would move into a

district they knew what district they were in, and what school that child was going to attend.

MIKE: Did this ever change for any reason, such as too many at one or the other?

FLORENCE: Evidently not or I wouldn't have had that many in one little school.

MIKE: Was the schoolhouse used for community or social activities as well as for education?

FLORENCE: Yes, they were. They would have literaries and different organizations. We always had 4H in the schoolhouse. We would have our 4H meetings there. They would have Sunday school in schoolhouses. They were used.

MIKE: Were there any traditions that were peculiar to your school?

FLORENCE: Probably not. There were some that I know who didn't try to raise money to get equipment for the school. They would accept the fact that it wasn't there, but I always felt as though I needed more equipment in that school for the students to use. I would try to raise money. The school was always very

willing to go ahead, as I say, with a box supper or a pie supper. The parents would come and support us and buy.

MIKE: Was there a school board?

FLORENCE: Yes, there were always three people on the school board. They were elected by the patrons of the district.

MIKE: Do you remember any of their names?

FLORENCE: Oh, I remember all of them.

MIKE: All of them?

FLORENCE: Yes.

MIKE: Did you have an organization that was similar to a PTA?

FLORENCE: No.

MIKE: Who hired and fired the teachers?

FLORENCE: The school board which was elected by the patrons. In April they always had a school board meeting when a school board member was elected. Some of

them served for years and years and others maybe served one term.

MIKE: Did anyone else have any input into the hiring and firing, such as the town's people?

FLORENCE: No, town people couldn't have cared less what was out there.

MIKE: The country people?

FLORENCE: Yes, we were way off out there.

MIKE: Did any of those people? You didn't have to have a meeting or anything?

FLORENCE: No.

MIKE: Are there any controversies surrounding your school?

FLORENCE: No, I don't think so. I think most of the districts never interfered with another district in any way that I ever knew of. It seemed as if, as far as I was concerned, in teaching your methods were always accepted and appreciated by the patrons of the district.

MIKE: Did the school make any lasting contributions to the community?

FLORENCE: No, there was never anybody to do anything with.

MIKE: Why did the school close?

FLORENCE: The schools either consolidated with the towns and put out bus routes or else they ran out of students.

MIKE: On finance. Was the land purchased or given to the school?

FLORENCE: The school districts. As long as that school was being used, the land belonged to the district. Then it went back to the land owner. At one time the district up in our district where we lived, had a 99 year lease on it as long as it was being used for anything as a community activity, clubs, 4H, Sunday school. Any time we were not keeping it up, then it would go back to the land owner. It has gone back to the land owner now.

MIKE: Where did you get funds to operate your school outside of your box supper?

FLORENCE: It was through taxes just like your school's operate now. Each district was allotted for their acreage, the taxes.

MIKE: How much did it cost for students to enroll?

FLORENCE: There was no cost. They were all free schools. It was just the expense of buying the coal and hiring the teacher. Paying her wages and that were just about the only expenses unless they had a little upkeep on it.

MIKE: What was your salary when you first started?

FLORENCE: I started at eighty-five dollars a month. The first two years I received eighty-five dollars a month. Then everything started going down in the thirties. The third year it was seventy dollars. The teacher that followed me that year got forty dollars. I went to the consolidated one where we were having to furnish a car and haul the students. I got one hundred twenty dollars a month, but that was for both jobs. Then I think one year I got sixty-five dollars a month and the last year I really got high wages, one hundred twenty-five dollars a month. Those were top wages for a teacher.

MIKE: How did they determine your salary?

FLORENCE: According to how much money they had in the treasury. When they didn't have very much, they tried to hire a teacher just as cheap as they could.

MIKE: Were the teachers hired each year?

FLORENCE: Yes, each year, generally, you would send your applications in. You got them in around the first of April if you were wanting to change schools. After their school board election in the middle of April, the school board would get together and hire their teacher.

MIKE: There was no guarantee that you would have a job?

FLORENCE: Oh, no, there was no such thing as tenure. I do not believe in tenure. I think it's one of the worst things that has ever been put into the educational system.

MIKE: Could you bargain for your salary at all?

FLORENCE: Yes, you could because there have been times I got more than what they had planned on paying.

MIKE: How did you get your pay checks?

FLORENCE: Some school boards would bring your pay checks to school. With other school boards, you went around to the school board and got your pay check. Especially when they were giving a warrant. They all three had to sign the warrant. If it was too much trouble for them

to get together and sign that warrant, the teacher would have to take it and get all three signatures on the warrant. Generally, I had very good school board members who brought me my check to school.

MIKE: They gave you warrants during the thirties?

FLORENCE: Yes.

MIKE: Can you tell me a little about that?

FLORENCE: They didn't have enough money to run the school so they would give you this warrant. All three school board members had to sign the warrant. If you could get a banker to accept that warrant, you could get your money out of it. There were times they wanted to discount it in case they were going to have to pay interest. They didn't want to be left without having the full amount of what that was going to be. They thought the teacher should be the one that took the discount. I never had much trouble with my warrants. My dad had banked down here for years. I brought my warrant down, and they told me they couldn't cash it. I went home feeling pretty discouraged and told Dad. Dad said, "Come on, were going to town." We went to town.

He went in to see the banker. From then on they cashed my warrants. I don't know exactly what Dad had to say.

MIKE: Is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to tell about? Your experiences?

FLORENCE: Well, there was one school where I had these children. That was in that consolidated district. The night before school started, the bridge we had to cross to get to school washed out. It's a big bridge out there by what's the Stover Ranch now. Joe was driving that morning. He had to carry everybody across the creek to get to the school because we couldn't get across with the car. Still the water was running too fast, but he wasn't afraid to walk. He would take one of those little kids under each arm and carry them across the creek.

MIKE: That's your husband?

FLORENCE: Yes, of course, all of them wanted to know what are you going to do with the teacher. Well, I'm going to carry her across the creek. So then he carried me across the creek. I could have walked, but they thought it was nicer that way. That year I had a little cross eyed boy in school. He also had a cleft palate

and a hair lip, but I never could tell whether he was studying or whether he was looking at something else. To look at him you couldn't tell. He needed doctoring so very bad. They had doctored him some. I have wondered about the child all through these years wanting to know whether his eyes were corrected. A lot of the students I have had visit me. Some of them have come through from Nebraska, Oregon, Topeka. Some of them were neighbor children out there. I have pictures of all kinds that they have sent me of their high school graduations, college graduations, things that I am very proud of.

MIKE: If you grew up today, would you be a teacher?

FLORENCE: Oh, yes. I would.

MIKE: Wouldn't pass it up for anything?

FLORENCE: No, I have always regretted letting my certificates expire because I love children.

MIKE: What is your general consensus of teaching during the dirty thirties?

FLORENCE: I think probably it was the biggest challenge there was because you never knew when you went to school

that morning what the day was going to end like. There were days that it could be perfectly clear and calm when we would go to school and maybe by the middle of the forenoon those clouds would roll in. It would be black. There would be dirt everywhere. It would be hard for you to eat your lunch. The water bucket, unless you put something over it, would be filled with dust. I think probably it was harder on children knowing that when they came to school they didn't know how their folks were going to get there that night to pick them up because, if the dirt was blowing, I held that student until his parents were able to get there and pick him up.